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ABSTRACT

This study examined the opportunities children have to plan their everyday activities outside of school, with particular attention to the role of age and cultural factors in these experiences. Parents of 127 children between the ages of 5 and 12 years participated, with 69 of the families Euro American and 58 Hispanic. The parents completed a 10-page survey that tapped the nature and extent of their children's non-school activities, including organized lessons, types of play inside and outside the home, chores, and self care. Parents were also asked about their children's involvement in the decision to participate in these activities. Patterns indicate that children do have some opportunity outside of school to plan their time, and that these opportunities are, in some instances, related to the children's age and the cultural values of the community in which the child is a member. (Contains six tables.) (Author)

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Everyday Opportunities for the Development of Planning Skills in Euro-American and Latino Children *

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Abstract

This study examined the opportunities children have to plan their everyday activities outside of school, with particular attention to the role of age and cultural factors in these experiences. Parents of 127 children between the ages of 5 and 12 years participated, with 69 of the families Euro-American and 58 Hispanic. The parents completed a 10-page survey that tapped the nature and extent of their children's nonschool activities, including organized lessons, types of play inside and outside the home, chores and self-care. We also asked about their children's involvement in the decision to participate in these activities. Patterns indicate that children do have some opportunity outside of school to plan their time, and that these opportunities are, in some instances, related to the children's age and the cultural values of the community in which the child is a member.

* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, August 1995, New York City.

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Aims

This research explored the development of children's planning skills by focusing on children's participation in activities outside of school. Particular attention was paid to children's opportunities to decide upon these activities. The role of child age, gender, and ethnicity in these experiences was explored. The underlying psychological question concerns the opportunities children have to plan and conduct their own activities. A basic assumption of human development is that with increasing age children will have greater regulation of their own activities. In fact, increasing skill at this is considered critical for development. However, several recent societal trends, such as day care, privatization of play, and apprenticeship training and tutorials, may interfere with children's opportunities to regulate much of their own time.

The main questions raised in this research are:

1. Do children have much opportunity to develop planning skills in everyday life?
2. Are these opportunities related to child age and sociocultural practices in the communities in which development occurs?

Method

Subjects. Parents (or guardians) of 127 children participated. Their children's ages ranged from 5 to 12 years and included 53 5-7-year-olds (42%), 35 8-9-year-olds (27%), and 39 10-12-year-olds (31%). Two-thirds of the children were male (62%). Two cultural groups were represented: Euro-American (54%) and Hispanic American (46%).

Materials. Parents completed a 10-page survey in English or Spanish, depending upon their preference. Questions were asked about their children's activities before school, after school, and in the evening, as well as who decided that the child would do these activities. We asked if their children ever reported having nothing to do and what the children typically do when they feel this way. Parents were also asked to indicate the age at which they think the average child is able to engage in various activities and responsibilities around the home, as well as the age their child was (or will be) able to engage in these same activities. Household and neighborhood information was also collected.

Procedure. Parents were recruited through public schools and community centers in Riverside, CA. They completed the surveys at home and returned them in a postage paid envelope. Upon receipt they were sent $5 in appreciation of their assistance.

Results

There were no differences in the two cultural groups in family status (one vs. two parent families), housing type, or length in neighborhood (see Table 1 for demographic information). Both groups reported an average income level in the range of $10,000-25,000 per year. Mean educational level for parents differed in the two groups, with Euro-Americans reporting an average attainment of some college for both mothers and fathers. Hispanic parents reported an average attainment of a high school diploma for fathers and some high school for mothers. Hispanic parents reported a higher average number of people per household than Euro-American parents. Both groups expressed some concern about neighborhood safety, with Hispanic parents being more concerned than Euro-American parents during the day.

Analyses compared parents' responses to questions about their children's activities in the two cultural groups, the three age groups of children, and child gender.

Morning Activities. No cultural differences emerged, however an age x gender interaction indicated that with increasing age, boys are more involved in preparing their own lunch, $F(1,125) = 2.32$, $p < .05$. Girls had a consistently high rate of doing this activity.

After-School and Evening Activities. More than half (59%) of the Euro-American children went home after school, whereas 43% of the Hispanic children did so, $t(125) = 1.84$, $p<.07$. Most of the remaining children were home by 5 p.m. In both groups, children in after-school care were primarily at day care centers. Children in the two cultural groups had similar patterns of involvement in organized activities. Only one difference, in scouting, appeared, $t(68)=2.54$, $p<.01$. Who decided on the children's involvement in these activities? In the main, parents and children shared responsibility. However, adults were generally more influential than children in determining children's lessons and club memberships (see Table 2).

In terms of indoor play, the groups differed in computer activities, with Euro-American children more likely to engage in this, $t(125)=4.24$, $p<.001$. For outdoor play, Euro-American children were more likely to go to playgrounds, $t(125) =3.26$, $p<.001$, and other children's homes, $t(125)=2.63$, $p<.01$, than Hispanic children. No differences appeared in evening activities.

Few age-related patterns occurred in activity and play participation, but some did emerge in household responsibilities. Older girls were more likely to run errands than younger girls. However, boys, in general, were more likely to run errands than girls.

Do Your Children Ever Have Nothing To Do? More than two-thirds of the parents reported that their children sometimes say they have nothing to do. No age or gender-related patterns appeared. A marginal difference for culture occurred. More Euro-American than Hispanic parents reported that their children felt this way, $F(1,125) = 3.28$, $p<.07$ (see Table 3).

Parents described several behaviors that their children engaged in when they felt this way (see Table 4). An age x culture interaction appeared for the behavior of creating one's own activity, $F(1,125) = 4.36$, $p < .001$. Euro-American parents reported this more than Hispanic parents, and Hispanic parents of older children were less likely than those with children in the middle age group to report this.

Parental Beliefs. Euro-American and Hispanic parents differed substantially in their beliefs about when the average child is able to participate in certain activities and responsibilities. For 17 of the 21 activities asked about, Euro-American parents reported younger ages than Hispanic parents (Table 5). When asked about when their own children were able to do these activities, Euro-Americans differed from Hispanics on 15 of these same activities in the same direction as above (Table 6).

Conclusions

These data suggest that both Euro-American and Hispanic children are participating in planning various aspects of their everyday lives. However, one striking feature of the data is how little time children seem to have in the course of the day to practice planning on their own. Much

of what occurs in their daily lives bears some mark of adult organization or influence. This observation is consistent with views of cognitive socialization that stress the role of cultural participation in development.

Parental beliefs concerning the ages at which children are able to do various activities did differ in the two communities, with Hispanic parents providing higher ages. This is consistent with the belief that Hispanic Americans hold more traditional beliefs and expectations about children and their development than Euro-Americans.

One dilemma facing developmental psychologists who adopt practice views of cognitive development is how to account for the opportunities that children have to practice and develop particular cognitive skills. Further analyses of these data, currently underway, will address this concern by attending to the ways in which planning skills may be practiced, aided and/or impeded in the everyday experiences children have.

Table 1

Demographic Information

	Euro-American	Hispanic
Family information		
% one-parent families	27%	17%
% two-parent families	62%	52%
$\bar{X}$ number in household	4.55	5.22
Dwelling information		
% live in house	68%	62%
% live in apartment	29%	38%
% live in motel	3%	0%
Length of residence		
less than 6 months	10%	7%
6 - 12 months	9%	21%
1 - 2 years	10%	22%
more than 2 years	71%	50%
Neighborhood safety		
Day: very safe	25%	16%
fairly safe	59%	48%
not safe	16%	36%
Night: very safe	13%	12%
fairly safe	49%	35%
not safe	38%	53%

Table 2

Percentage of Decisions About Children's Involvement in After-School Activities Made by Children, Parents, and Parent and Child Together for the Two Cultural Groups

	Who Decides?		
Euro-American			
	Child	**Parent**	**Parent & Child**
Lessons	10%	36%	54%
Scouts	0%	0%	100%
Sports	0%	40%	60%
Church	4%	13%	83%
Clubs	0%	55%	45%
Hispanic			
Lessons	0%	60%	40%
Scouts	0%	0%	0%
Sports	15%	15%	70%
Church	48%	4%	48%
Clubs	8%	67%	25%

Table 3

Percentage of Parents Who Report That Their Children Say That They Have Nothing To Do

Age	Euro-American	Hispanic
5 - 7	74%	59%
8 - 9	75%	80%
10 - 12	89%	57%

Table 4

Percentage of Children Who Do the Following When They Say They Have Nothing To Do

Euro-American	Age		
	5 - 7	8 - 9	10 - 12
Create own activity	64%	60%	67%
Seek activity from parents	19%	5%	11%
Go somewhere alone	3%	5%	0%
Fuss	16%	15%	17%
Other	3%	0%	0%
Hispanic			
Create own activity	14%	53%	33%
Seek activity from parents	18%	7%	5%
Go somewhere alone	4%	0%	0%
Fuss	18%	13%	9%
Other	4%	13%	9%

Table 5

AT WHAT AGE DO YOU THINK THE AVERAGE CHILD IS ABLE TO DO THE FOLLOWING?

Activity	Mean Age (S.D.)	
	Euro-American	Hispanic
Play outside in the neighborhood with friends	6.92 (2.1)	8.81 (2.8)
Walk to a neighborhood store alone in the day	10.91 (2.0)	12.11 (2.2)
Have regular chores around the house	5.97 (1.7)	7.53 (3.4)
Be responsible for keeping own room clean	6.14 (1.7)	7.04 (2.2)
Get a regular allowance	7.18 (2.2)	9.05 (3.5)
Walk or ride bike to school alone	10.36 (2.0)	12.25 (2.6)
Baby-sit for a younger sibling or child	12.96 (1.9)	14.35 (2.0)
Get a paid job outside the home	15.07 (1.7)	16.03 (2.1)
Stay home alone while parent goes on an errand	12.05 (2.2)	13.47 (2.4)
Plan own birthday party	10.67 (3.3)	12.12 (3.4)
Decide to take music or dance lessons	7.67 (2.8)	9.02 (3.3)
Decide to be on a sports team	7.12 (2.3)	8.23 (2.9)
Decide to participate in a club or organization	7.42 (2.0)	9.21 (3.3)
Decide what chores he or she will do around home	9.21 (3.2)	8.73 (3.0)
Decide what to wear to school	7.13 (1.9)	8.54 (3.2)
Decide what to eat for breakfast and lunch	7.64 (2.5)	8.25 (2.9)
Decide how to spend their allowance	8.30 (2.2)	9.98 (3.5)
Decide what to watch on TV	9.49 (4.4)	10.77 (4.0)
Decide what to do after school	9.20 (3.6)	10.89 (3.6)
Decide what to do in the evening before bedtime	8.91 (3.7)	10.51 (4.0)
Decide when to go to bed	13.46 (3.2)	13.33 (3.6)

Table 6

AT WHAT AGE WAS YOUR CHILD (OR WILL YOUR CHILD BE) ABLE TO DO THE FOLLOWING?

Activity	Mean Age (S.D.)	
	Euro-American	Hispanic
Play outside in the neighborhood with friends	6.51 (2.0)	8.94 (2.8)
Walk to a neighborhood store alone in the day	10.96 (1.9)	11.99 (2.7)
Have regular chores around the house	5.91 (2.0)	7.63 (2.7)
Be responsible for keeping own room clean	6.41 (2.0)	7.46 (2.6)
Get a regular allowance	7.23 (2.2)	9.25 (3.1)
Walk or ride bike to school alone	10.37 (2.1)	12.14 (2.7)
Baby-sit for a younger sibling or child	13.01 (2.0)	13.76 (2.3)
Get a paid job outside the home	14.74 (2.2)	15.84 (2.1)
Stay home alone while parent goes on an errand	12.06 (2.4)	13.09 (2.4)
Plan own birthday party	10.50 (3.4)	11.68 (3.8)
Decide to take music or dance lessons	7.53 (2.6)	9.84 (3.4)
Decide to be on a sports team	7.30 (2.5)	8.12 (2.5)
Decide to participate in a club or organization	7.38 (2.4)	9.31 (3.0)
Decide what chores he or she will do around home	9.00 (3.1)	9.05 (3.3)
Decide what to wear to school	7.04 (2.2)	8.89 (3.3)
Decide what to eat for breakfast and lunch	7.42 (2.4)	8.30 (3.0)
Decide how to spend their allowance	8.04 (2.4)	10.35 (3.8)
Decide what to watch on TV	9.04 (4.2)	10.15 (4.1)
Decide what to do after school	8.78 (3.6)	10.89 (3.8)
Decide what to do in the evening before bedtime	8.79 (3.5)	10.54 (4.0)
Decide when to go to bed	13.28 (3.4)	13.09 (3.7)